

September 30, 2009

Washington, DC – From the shootings at Columbine to the tragedy at Virginia Tech, violence in schools has resulted in many heartbreaking headlines in recent years. As part of his ongoing effort to find methods of reducing school crime, and to institute crime-preventing regulations, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) introduced a resolution (H. Res. 90) expressing Congressional support for the designation of September as National Campus Safety Awareness Month (NCSAM). Today, the House voted unanimously in favor of the measure, which builds on work the Congressman has done in the District – where he has hosted an Anti-Violence Summit as well as education summits that have addressed the issue of ways to reduce violence – and in Washington, where he has advocated for better reporting of incidents in schools.

“We are more aware now than ever about the importance of keeping our nation’s college students safe,” said Congressman Sestak. “National Campus Safety Awareness Month, which comes at the beginning of the new school year, offers a perfect opportunity to provide students with critical awareness that they need to help stay safe on campus. Campuses, like any other community, have to deal with crime and this awareness better equips every member of the community to protect themselves and prevent crime.”

Currently, in accordance with the federal Jeanne Clery Act, the nation’s colleges and universities are required to publish and distribute an Annual Campus Security Report, maintain a public log of all crimes reported to them, and provide warnings of crimes that represent a threat to the security of students and employees. From these reports, it has been revealed that 117 homicides, 10,000 forcible-sex offenses, 16,000 aggravated assaults, and 3,071 cases of arson occurred on campus from 2005 to 2007. Additionally, between one fifth and one quarter of female undergraduates will be the victim of a completed or attempted rape, usually by someone they know, during their college careers; however, fewer than five percent of these incidents are reported to the police according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

As part of the process of developing this resolution, the Congressman met with representatives from Security on Campus Inc., an organization based in King of Prussia that was founded by the parents of Jeanne Clery, who was raped and murdered as a student at Lehigh University.

The Clerys and staff have worked tirelessly to improve campus safety and security throughout the country, including working to pass six federal laws dealing with college campus safety- most notably, the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crimes Statistics Act.

"I fully recognize that violence and crime know no boundaries," said Congressman Sestak in discussing the critical need to bring together a variety of leaders to address the issue. "We need the full force of our citizens, community organizations--like Security on Campus-- religious leaders and elected officials as we seek pragmatic solutions to violence and its causes."

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, the Congressman was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, the Congressman is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*